



VIDEO NEWS

■ HAWK CAM IS HERE

Skateboarding superstar Tony Hawk has lots of cameras trained on him whenever he touches a skateboard. If you like this idea, you could try the Tony Hawk Helmet Cam. This is a lightweight, self-contained recording device that attaches to a helmet. It can record up to 30 minutes of video and sound. Resolution is only 640x480, but a CD-ROM of editing tools is included.

The Helmet Cam will be available from 7th October for around £100. A review will depend on how daring we feel.



■ HIGH TIMES FOR BSKYB

BSkyB has released more details of its High Definition (HD) service to be released early in 2006. HD channels will include Sky Movies and Sky Sports. Sky Sports will offer Premiership football in HD with Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound, bringing the terraces to your living room. Sky has promised to broadcast all its Premiership games in HD.

Movies will be provided by two channels, as well as pay-per-view offers. Key early titles will include *Spider-Man 2*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *House of Flying Daggers*.

Sky HD will support 720p and 1,080i picture formats and use MPEG4 for compression. Prices for the hardware and subscriptions haven't yet been finalised. Visit www.sky.com for details.



REVIEW HARD DISK CAMERA

JVC GZ-MG20

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £474 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.askdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.jvc.co.uk



Considering the advances in hard disk technology, it's surprising that digital video is still being recorded to tape using the MiniDV standard. But JVC's hard disk-based Everio G series could change all that.

The GZ-MG20 looks pretty similar to many compact silver MiniDV cameras on the market. However, in the space where the tape would be sits a 1.8" hard disk with 20GB of storage. The key advantage of this hard disk is increased storage capacity. On its normal setting, you get nine hours of recording, which equates to at least a year's worth of birthdays, holidays and weddings for the casual user. Bumping the quality up to the Ultra setting gives four-and-a-half hours of recording. If you need to shoot more than this in one session, hard disk recording may not be for you.

At the Ultra setting, compression is equivalent to a well-authored DVD movie. Image quality from the lens and CCD are great. The camera reacts quickly to changing light conditions and functions well indoors and out.

The other key advantages are browsing and transferring files. When set to playback, you can see a thumbnail on the LCD screen for each clip on the hard disk. These can then be selected and viewed instantly, without the fuss of winding a tape. This brings instant digital camera-style gratification to video cameras. Transferring files is equally straightforward. Just plug in the USB Hi-Speed connection and import the files to the supplied CyberLink software for editing. Alternatively, drag and drop them to any folder on your PC.



The GZ-MG20 has an impressive 25x optical zoom and pleasing ergonomics. The LCD screen has decent viewing angles, but uses the traditional 4:3 ratio rather than the more cinematic 16:9. There's a built-in light for lowlight situations, and all the usual options for setting white balance, exposure and focus.

Unfortunately, there's no viewfinder and you have to wait about five seconds when opening the LCD screen before you can record. The menu isn't particularly well laid out and the buttons beneath the LCD are a bit unresponsive. Also, it can't be used as a portable hard disk, as you can't copy files to it.

JVC hasn't tried to revolutionise the video camera. Instead, it has smoothly integrated all the advantages of a hard disk into a proven design. We highly recommend the GZ-MG20 for light or occasional use. However, if you need more than nine hours of footage, you should stick with a bag full of MiniDV's for now.

Seth Barton

✓ Onboard hard disk for massive storage

✗ No viewfinder; limited to nine hours of recording

SPECIFICATIONS Hard disk camcorder, 20GB storage, 1/4" CCD, 25x optical zoom, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** GZ-MG20U

HOTLIST MEDIA PLAYER

PINNACLE ShowCenter 200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE: £162

SUPPLIER: www.savastore.com

DETAILS www.pinnaclesys.com

The ShowCenter 200 streams media files from your PC to your living room using Microsoft's Media Connect software. It supports all the most common photo, audio and video file types and is easy to install. Its wired and wireless connections mean it will fit into any home network, too. It's the best media player on the market.



SPECIFICATIONS 1.5GHz PC required with Windows XP with SP1 and 256MB RAM; SCART, component, S-video, and composite outputs, two stereo phono outputs, coaxial S/PDIF output, optical S/PDIF outputs, USB, 100Mbit/s network, wireless 802.11g

HOTLIST DIGITAL TV TUNER

NEBULA ELECTRONICS DigiTV USB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Nebula Electronics 01689 897090

DETAILS www.nebula-electronics.com

Most TV cards have a reputation for being difficult to install and use, so it's a relief to find the DigiTV USB. Simple to install, it automatically locates all the digital channels and downloads a seven-day guide. Easy to program and full of clever features, this is the best digital TV tuner on the market.



SPECIFICATIONS RF input, MPEG2 recording, USB Hi-Speed interface. **Part code** DigiTV USB2



HOTLIST DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA

PANASONIC NV-GS75

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £380 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.cameras2u.com

DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk



Panasonic's NV-GS75 offers three CCDs at an affordable price. The technology gives the camera excellent picture quality and vivid colours. Only the 10x optical zoom seems a bit stingy compared to other models on the market.

Despite being lightweight and plastic, the NV-GS75 feels well made. The lack of a true 16:9 mode is the only big let-down on an otherwise excellent and affordable DV camera.



SPECIFICATIONS Mini DV camcorder, 3 CCD, 10x optical zoom, USB2 and FireWire interfaces. **Part code** NVGS75

REVIEW AUDIO/VIDEO DEVICE**CREATIVE
Sound Blaster
Audigy 2 ZS Video Editor**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £156 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.comDETAILS <http://uk.europe.creative.com>

Video capture from analogue sources can be messy. The theory is simple: digitise the incoming signal, compress it to MPEG2 (or similar) format and save it to hard disk. In practice, the minefield of video and audio standards and the time-critical, processor-intensive nature of video capture means getting it to work reliably can be a struggle.

The Video Editor aims to simplify this. It's a USB device, so installation is straightforward and it is suitable for desktop and notebook PCs. What's more, it handles video compression to DV, MPEG1 or MPEG2 formats in hardware rather than software, taking the strain off the host PC.

Capture from the S-video and composite inputs is handled smoothly using the bundled Ulead VideoStudio 8 SE and MovieFactory 3 SE video-editing and DVD-authoring software. A range of capture templates is available, including MPEG2 with Dolby Digital audio at various bit rates, making it ideal for DVD projects. A FireWire port is also included for digital transfers from DV cameras. Our only gripe is that input selection is hidden under the advanced settings. Moving between DV and MPEG formats sometimes changed the selected input without telling us.

The hardware MPEG2 compression gave excellent results, even at lower bit rates. The built-in Dolby Digital encoding is a rare and welcome bonus, allowing more space for video on DVD Video discs. However, the audio input used during

analogue video capture was a little noisy. Video capture is only possible using the supplied software and the FireWire port can't be used with other peripherals. Still, captured video can easily be imported into other software for editing.

The device is also a USB sound card and four-port USB hub. Specifications for the former are similar to those of Creative's Audigy 2 NX, reviewed in our speakers and sound cards test (*Labs, Shopper* April 2005). This provides excellent audio quality and great features, including 7.1 surround output, DVD-Audio playback, many connections and a remote control. Unlike the Audigy 2 NX, this device supports Digital Theatre Systems (DTS) sound and Dolby Digital soundtracks in DVDs, and comes with DVD playback software. The only thing missing is an ASIO driver for low-latency performance in music-production and video-editing software.

This is one of the friendliest, most straightforward analogue capture devices we've used. The price is what we'd expect for the video capture features alone, so you're effectively getting a USB hub and top-notch sound card for free.

Ben Pitt

- ✓ Reliable video capture; high-quality sound card; great price
- ✗ No ASIO audio driver; noisy audio in analogue video capture

SPECIFICATIONS S-video, composite, line, mic and optical S/PDIF inputs, S-video, composite, four line, coaxial and optical S/PDIF and headphone outputs, integrated four-port USB hub and FireWire port, USB Hi-Speed interface, DV/MPEG1/MPEG2 hardware compression. **REQUIREMENTS** Windows XP SP1, 1.3GHz Pentium III processor, 256MB RAM, 600MB disk space, USB Hi-Speed port. **Part code** 70SB 04800 0001

HOTLIST PORTABLE DVD PLAYER**MUSTEK
PL510**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £224 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.meggydogcomputers.co.ukDETAILS www.mustek.com

With a large 10" screen, Mustek's PL510 portable DVD player is a joy to watch and it still fits comfortably in your lap. It supports Dolby Digital stereo, so listening to movies using headphones is an enjoyable experience.

Battery life is an acceptable two-and-a-half hours, which will let you watch all but the longest films. Unfortunately it lacks DivX playback for home video encoders.



SPECIFICATIONS 10" LCD, 2½ hours' playback, Multi-region DVD, SD/MMC card reader. **Part code** PL510

HOTLIST DVD AUTHORIZING SOFTWARE**ULEAD
DVD MovieFactory 4**

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.ulead.co.uk

DVD MovieFactory is still the best choice for anyone who wants to perform DVD authoring on the cheap. Its menu design is comprehensive and easy to use, and its set-top recorder compatibility, direct tape-to-disc burning and editing of pre-recorded discs are all welcome for this very reasonable price.



REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, 800MHz Pentium III processor, 128MB RAM (512MB recommended), 950MB disk space plus 5GB for video

CHOOSING A...**DV
CAMERA** **Step-by-step guide to buying the ideal digital video camera**

- 1** If you just want to make home movies, a £250 digital video (DV) camera with the specs shown below will be fine. A range of auto-exposure modes will ensure you get decent results in all conditions. The LCD screen provides easy playback on location, while the remote allows for comfortable viewing on the sofa. If you'll be using the zoom a lot, concentrate on the optical zoom spec, as the digital zoom's effective range depends on this.
- 2** If you want to edit video, get a model with DV-in. You can then transfer edited footage back to MiniDV tape and run off VHS copies via the camera's S-video out. Cameras with S-video in can often be used to capture analogue video too.
- 3** Enthusiasts will pay for a more flexible camera. A good manual focus and colour viewfinder will make for better camerawork, an external microphone will transform your audio, and good battery and charger options will keep you filming for longer. A high-resolution CCD might improve video quality, but while this and a flash memory slot will make your DV camera double as a digital camera, quality will be basic.
- 4** Miniature DV cameras, especially those using the tiny MicroMV tapes, may tempt gadget-lovers, but picture quality may be compromised. Models with fancy on-camera editing are a waste of money; that's what your PC is for.
- 5** If you're serious about film-making, £1,500 buys you a DV camera with superb optics, three CCDs and the requisite connectors to attach equally expensive professional AV accessories.

FILL IN YOUR SPECS HERE
(Recommended minimum in grey)

CCD: 400,000 pixels

ZOOM: 10x optical/300x digital

VIDEO PORTS: FireWire out, S-video out

MONITORING: Mono viewfinder, 2.5" colour LCD

MEDIA: MiniDV tape

STILLS CAPTURE: 640x480 to tape

EXTRAS: Remote control